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HISTORY OF KERALA

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SOUTH INDIA.

HISTORY OF KERALA

A HISTORY OF KERALA, WRITTEN IN THE FORM OF NOTES ON VISSCHER'S LETTERS FROM MALABAR,

BY

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FOREWORD

BY THE EDITOR.

It was on the 24th of October 1924 that the printing of the first volume of this great work was started. It has demanded my unremitting toil all these twelve years; and it is with no small gratification that I contemplate the completion of this arduous undertaking.

My connection with this work commenced long before this period. While I was studying in Madras, I had to frequent libraries there to furnish extracts and to verify references for this. After I settled down here to practise at the bar, I have had to read several parts of this with the author, and to get, at his instance, a Note or two revised by my revered master, the late Mr. D. M. Cruickshank, and a few others by Mr. Glyn Barlow, when they were Principals of the local Maharaja's College. To our dismay, both of them expressed their inability to proceed further than what they did, as the subject was not familiar to them and the task not easy.

As desired by the author, in his last will and testament, I have tried, according to my lights, to revise the manuscripts as carefully as was possible for me to do it. The absence of a decent reference library in the vicinity had been to me a very serious impediment. But I have done what I could, by going to the extent of incurring personal expenditure on the purchase of books for the purpose.

Another difficulty had been the reading of the proofs, not once, but, as a rule, twice, and sometimes even three times. Only those who have experienced the trouble, and the perennial capacity of the compositors to create fresh errors can realise the mental and the physical ~~exhaustion~~ exhaustion caused by such work. But for

the uniform kindness of my friends, Mr. C.P. Narayana Menon, the quondam Superintendent of the Government Press and Mr. N. M. Parameswara Ayyar, the present incumbent, and of his assistants, Mr.S. Sundara Ayyar and Mr. N. Kochunni Menon, Examiners, and Mr. P. Raman Menon, a Composing Foreman, I would have had to give up the task in despair. I am indebted to them to a degree which cannot be adequately expressed in words. If the scrutiny of *savants* will yet detect mistakes, I shall leave these to their correction and their indulgence.

Mrs. Padmanabha Menon, the wife of the author, once told me of a talk she had with her husband. An year before his death, she chanced to ask him as to why he was not seeing this his life-work through the press. He then let her know the prohibitive rates quoted by many printing firms in India and in England and of certain other obstacles in his way, and it seems he closed his reply with the remark that, so long as I was alive, he had no fear about that matter. His direction in the will and these works have cheered me not a little in my labour of love; and his wife, till her death, lightened my task in every practical way.

By the Grace of God, it is my privilege to have brought the publication of this work to its completion, a work that is sure to mark a new chapter in the study of the History of Kerala. If delay there was, it was none of my making.

I write this from a seat in my garden facing the new Cochin Harbour. There is a mild breeze about and the music of murmuring wavelets; and in the sky, over the prevailing background of a light violet colour, one can note the varying tints of a sun that is setting. They give a glow to the lights and shadows athwart the land-locked lagoon and the feathery palms. As the evening shadows gather, birds are hastily flying to their nests. A stillness fills the bowl of the sky. A solitary Brahmini Kite is loitering in the firmament, either to

take in air or to spot its prey, or, who knows, perhaps, to enjoy the prospect. "All is peace in the home; she sits by me, in the silence of blissful comradeship, who has shared with me the toil of life, and the joy of it," and who, above all, by her love and care and cheering words, has made it possible for me to do my life's work.

In the remote past, Kerala played a glorious part in the spread of culture and commerce. That these volumes will indicate. May her mission in the times to come be grander and even more glorious is the prayer of this writer who can claim, without any breach of modesty, to have dedicated these literary labours to his country in a spirit of loving service. For,—that is my creed—after all, love and service form the flower and fruit of all true religions.

Kumārālayam, Ernakulam; 16th February 1937.	}	T. K. KRISHNA MENON.
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Visscher's

LETTERS FROM MALABAR.

LETTER XXIII.

Malabar temples—Religious service—Revenues attached to the temples—
Mode of consecration.

I shall now give you a description of the temples¹ in Malabar and their form of structure.

They are termed *pagodas*, (r houses of the gods, who are supposed to inhabit them and to receive in them the devotions of the pious. They are mostly built of stone; the grandest glitter with copper roofs. All the architectural talents of the heathen have been devoted to the erection of these edifices: their dwellings on the other hand are wretched, generally mere low mean huts; but the temples far surpass in grandeur any of the royal palaces. I have seen a highly ornamented pagoda in Cranganur, in which the gateway of the exterior gallery is surmounted with an arch of such skilful workmanship that even in Europe it would be admired as a work of art.³ We sometimes find arches and facings of marble, a material not found in Malabar.⁴ A wall furnished with a good front gateway encloses a quadrangle; within this enclosure in an empty uncovered space, free to every one, even the Christians and the unclean castes. This reminds me of the court of the gentiles, in Solomon's temple. The pagoda itself stands in the centre of this enclosure, the exterior of the building consists of a covered gallery open on the inside, though from without it appears to be all one. This gallery, which traverses all four sides of the edifice may be likened to the second court of the temple, frequented by the priests and Israelites. Within this again stands the house itself, surmounted by a pointed roof, and in the centre of this sanctuary there is a square stone elevation like an altar, its four corners furnished with four columns, on which stands the

1. Note 1, pp. 1 to 37.

2. Note 2, pp. 37 to 40.

3. Note 3, pp. 40 to 41.

4. Note 4, p. 41.

idol.¹ This image is made of various materials². I have seen silver specimens: they are sometimes gilt, but copper is the most common material. I have a few of these in my possession, which were taken at the pillage of the rich pagoda of Pounetour Nambocri³ they give one a good idea of the hideousness of the gods before whom these people prostrate themselves. Some are likenesses of men with elephant's trunks, others have four, six, or more arms, and others two or more heads⁴. The temples are all dedicated to special deities, as was the case with those of the Greeks and Romans, and the patron idol in each pagoda presides over the others; his form surpassing theirs both in size and splendour. I have seen a copper cow⁵ at the pagoda at Cranganur, almost as large as life. As the gods are supposed to delight in illuminations, several lamps both iron and copper, fastened into the walls of the second court on both sides, are lighted up on feast days.

There are cavities along the walls of the inside gallery, something like baking ovens, in which rajahs, princes, or private individuals may deposit their treasures for security. The keys of these treasure chambers are always kept by the proprietors, who may obtain access to them when they please with the assistance of the Brahmins who have the care of the temple. No Christian, Jew, or Moor, may penetrate into this sanctuary, though the gates are suffered to stand open, and we may approach as far as the threshold,⁶ but not near enough to obtain a sight of the interior; this I have found by experience, for if we attempted to intrude too far, we should be pushed back, as the temple would be polluted, and must then undergo fresh consecration and various ceremonies in order to render it fit again for the offices of religion. This would be the case even if we were merely to enter the tanks or wells in which the Brahmins, bound by their law, bathe daily they would be contaminated and require fresh consecration⁷ to purify them. For their folly is such that they imagine that purity consists not in the cleanliness of the soul but of that of the body. Not alone men of other religions are prohibited from entering their temples, but the same rule is extended even to the low and despised castes among themselves, a practice which runs counter to the notions of all other nations, For as the mere touch of these miserable creatures would defile Brahmin

1. Note 5, page 41.

2. Note 6, ib.

3. Note 7, p. 45.

4. Note 8, ib.

5. Note 9, p. 48.

6. Note 10, ib.

7. Note 11, p. 49.

or a member of the higher castes, so would their presence the temple of the gods, of whose favour and notice they are unworthy. The daily services¹ of the temple consist of prayers and devotions offered three times a day, morning, noon and night. The devotees perambulate the outer court, thrice, making their *Sombaie* or reverence (a gesture performed by bending forward and striking the forehead with clasped hands), each time they come opposite the door of the pagoda. The Brahmins observe a similar routine in the innermost gallery of the sanctuary, muttering prayers all the time. Then the first priest steps up to the altar and sprinkles holy water and flowers on the image, which act forms the daily sacrifice, for no blood must be shed in or near the temple. Estates are invariably attached to the pagodas from which they derive considerable revenues and their wealth is increased by the offerings and alms of the faithful.² I saw at Porcad two stone images, man and woman, which have stood for ages by the side of the river, so near, that in the rainy season they are flooded. Bags hang from their necks³ to receive the offerings of passengers on the river, who throw into them a portion of their fruits, rice, nely, etc., as an almsgiving to the adjacent pagoda. Rich pagodas are burdened with a number of Brahmins, perhaps 200 or 300 who must be fed: for so these Malabar priests cunningly contrive to be supported gratis.⁴ Besides this, at many of the rajah's courts are places called *marroe*,⁵ where food is dispensed to any Brahmin who demands it. There is one good thing about these pagodas, that they furnish provision for many wayfarers of their own religion, who resort to them, rice is never refused. They serve in this respect like hospitals or charitable establishments,⁶ where a man, however poor and destitute he may be, can always find shelter.

I had almost forgotten to state, that when in the daily service the priests come to the performance of the *Sombaie*, or reverence, the first priest holds up the image while the others bend their knees to it.⁷

On certain national feasts a solemn procession takes place. The idol, finely ornamented and placed in a palanquin or set up on an elephant and covered with a canopy, is paraded about

1. Note 12, pp. 49 to 63.
2. Note 13, pp. 63 to 104.
3. Note 14, p. 105—106.
4. Note 15, pp. 106—107.
5. Note 16, pp. 107—110.
6. Note 17, pp. 110—111.
7. Note 18, p. 119.

accompanied with music, and every body must perform the Sombaie before it. Thus still exists the procession of the tabernacle of Moloch, which, among the Egyptians, Syrians and other gentiles, used to cause the children of Israel to sin. The low castes who may not enter the temple, are permitted to attend at a distance on some of these occasions, and to deposit their donations of fanams before the temple for though not admitted, they are compelled to contribute to its support, as if it were a privilege so to do.¹ They possess temples of their own constructed of dried palm leaves, and if they could afford to build them of stone they must yet cover them with palm leaves they have no Brahmins for their priests, but members of their own caste minister the offices of religion.²

Near some pagodas, as those of Valdurti and Mowton,³ outside the enclosure stands a stone, at which the Nayars, who are permitted to partake of the flesh of all animals except cows, offer sacrifices of blood: here also they offer up vows to their deities⁴ to obtain the boon of fertility for their estates, promising in return to sacrifice so many cocks. When the day for the sacrifice arrives thousands assemble, and the Nayars officiate at the solemnity in place of the Brahmins, who may not touch the bodies of dead animals. The chief called *Belka Paru*⁵ first advances, cuts off the head of a cock which he throws on the ground letting the blood run on the stone, and then he takes the body home to his house, and devours it with his family. The others in succession follow his example, each sacrificing and eating his own cock. In the consecration of a new pagoda⁶ the building is first sprinkled with water and the leaves of the Ixora, and then smeared with cowdung; this done ten or twelve cows, as sacred beasts, are tied up inside the building and fed with grass, then with waters taken from four sources, the Ganges, the sea, the river near which the pagoda stands, and the opposite side of the same river, they sanctify the idol, the presiding genius of the temple; they next take a number of dishes (they must not be fewer than 49—but generally there are as many as 101 of them) made of gold, silver, copper or stone, filled with raw rice and covered with party coloured cloths, over which are strewed flowers and figures representing the 27 stars under the influence of which the days of the month are placed. These figures are made of gold or silver,

1. Note 19, p. 111.

2. Note 20, 1 p. 111—2.

3. Note 21, p. 112.

4. Note 22, pp. 112—3.

5. Note 23, pp. 113—115.

6. Note 24, pp. 115—122.

on each of which the name of the star is inscribed. These dishes remain in the pagoda for a period of 21 or 41 days according to pleasure, during which time the Brahmins assemble to the same number that there are dishes, offer up prayers to the tri-une god head, Brama, Vishnu and Siva, when this is over, a fire lighted in the quadrangle must be brought before the altar, on which the image is then set up, and fastened with mortar mixed up of various adhesive substances, pearl-dust, sugar, honey, cake, etc., and the Brahmins must be regaled for eleven or twelve days.

If the temple were to be polluted¹ by the presence of a Christian or a member of the low castes, 21 dishes of water with flowers must be introduced to purify it, the idol must be washed again with the four waters, a feast lasting for three days must be given to the Namboories, and the temple swept thrice a day and smeared with cow dung.

LETTER XXIV.

Superstitions of the Natives—How they consecrate their houses—Their charms against the evil eye—Auspicious on building their houses—The respect for the Kalu tree, and the state of departed souls—Exorcisms—Lucky and unlucky Omens

In this letter I propose to satisfy your curiosity respecting the superstitious practices and opinions which prevail among the benighted heathen, in the midst of whom I am at present sojourning.

A member of the higher castes will never inhabit his newly built house, until it has been solemnly purified and consecrated by the priests, because it is supposed to have been defiled by the builders, who belong to an unclean caste. Among the *grandeos* the ceremony of consecration takes place in the following manner. An idol is carried thrice round the house, to the sound of trumpets and deposited before the eastern door. The priests then enter the house, and having laid some cowdung mixed with ashes on a *pisang** leaf they mutter some prayers over it, after which a Namboori sprinkles the house, first with water from a copper basin in which are placed the small red flowers of the *Ixora* shrub called by the Portuguese *Foule Paran*, and then with the cowdung; the idol is then brought inside the house, and the Namboories proceed to eat some cakes. These ceremonies duly performed, a great feast is held outside the house, the food consisting of rice, butter

1. Notes 25 and 26, pp. 122 to 141.

2. Note 1, p. 142.

* The *pisang* is the *Areca catechu*, or Betel-nut palm (Trans)
See Brandes' Dict of Science.

pisang, milk and curry; the guests, who have been first thoroughly smeared with oil (like the ancient heathens, who used to anoint their guests as a mark of honor), sitting cross-legged around the building. While on the subject of their houses, I must mention their superstition about the east door; when they go out for the first time in the morning it must always be through this entrance which is considered lucky, because from it they first behold the morning sun, before which they bend with reverence.

'They are in the habit of setting up a *Molik* or figure in their fields, young plantations, and houses, and particularly in their roads, not for the purpose of scaring the birds, as is done in Europe, but to act as a charm against the evil eye.' This *Molik* may be the image either of an idol, a man, or an ape, or sometimes it is merely some kind of painted vessel. If the eye of a person possessed of a malign aspect fall on this object, it is robbed of all power of working mischief either to plants or to anything else. This superstition prevails not only among the heathen, for there are some Christians who are for ever talking of the *Toeca Olhos*. I was told by the Dutch Official at Paponetti, that there was a Mocqua chief living there, whose countenance was supposed by the natives, to be endowed with this pernicious influence; so that he was entreated never to enter fields when the plants were in bloom, lest he should injure them, which request he observed. They imagine that this evil eye works no harm to the lands and plants of the possessor, but rather increases their fertility.

In commencing the building of a house¹ the first prop must be put up on the east side. the carpenters open three or four cocoanuts, spilling the juice as little as possible, and put some tips of betel leaves into them, and, from the way these float in the liquid, they foretel whether the house will be lucky or unlucky, whether it will stand for a long or short period, and whether another will ever be erected on its side. I have been told that the heathens say that the destruction of fort Paponetti by our arms was foretold by the builders from these auguries. They receive for the performance of this rite one or two Cochin fanams, three measures of rice and a garment worth three fanams.

There is an odd shaped tree called a *Kalu*, the stem of which seems to be formed by several twisted branches growing into each other. It is generally very large, and its spreading branches shoot out roots, many of which fix themselves in the ground, thus furnishing fresh nourishment to enable the branches to extend

1. Note 2, pp. 142—147.

2. Note 3, pp. 147—183.

further. This tree is esteemed sacred,¹ and is hung about with lamps which are lighted up in the evening. They have a legend², that the chief of the minor gods, Cheraman by name, was despatched by the supreme deity to introduce certain improvements on the earth. Fatigued by his long journey through a dreary wilderness without food or drink, he stretched himself beneath the shadow of the banian tree to seek repose and refreshment, and his object was so marvellously effected that he arose with his strength as completely renovated as if he had partaken of a hearty meal. In memory of this event, this tree is dedicated to the pagodas in the neighbourhood of which one is always to be found, they are also planted there for the refreshment of departed souls. for the majority and the most intelligent of these heathens believe³ that in the beginning, the deity created a certain number of souls, which inhabit sometimes human and sometimes brute bodies; but that on quitting human bodies the souls repose for a century under the refreshing shade of the banian, after which they transmigrate into other bodies either of men or of beasts according to their conduct during their past life⁴. It is considered a piece of great good fortune to transmigrate into the body of a white cow whilst to pass into that of a buffalo is just the reverse as that animal undergoes great ill-treatment at the hands of the Malabars, being the object of their utmost contempt and aversion. The people believe that during the intermediate period of hundred years, the souls of the departed visit their descendants.⁵ They therefore prepare, either within or without their houses little apartments or huts, which are fresh smeared every morning, and furnished with a small bench, about a foot in length and a breadth from the ground, on which toddy is placed; which, in the evening, as the departed spirits have not touched it, they themselves drink, and it is considered a hallowed beverage. They always put aside a little rice at their meals, or strew some grains on the ground for these ghosts: and if they have more in the dish than they can eat, they throw out the remainder to the crows, and this also is put to the account of the spirits. They perform a ceremony like this on the feast of the souls,⁶ in the month of July.

They carry their ideas of witchcraft⁷ to an unequalled pitch; to this influence the most dire diseases are imputed in many

1. Note 4, pp. 184—194.

2. Note 5, p. 194.

3. Note 6, pp. 194—197.

4. Note 7, pp. 197—201.

5. Note 8, pp. 201—203.

6. Note 9, pp. 203—204.

7. Note 10, pp. 204—246.

places, and it is supposed to have power both to cause and cure them, so that apothecaries and doctors would find it difficult to obtain a livelihood here: they are less foolish in the neighbourhood of Cochin. It is said (by the majority, that is) that there exist 36,000 demons, of whom a few are good; and the worst among them are *Ijatte Pannikerri*, *Triangadi* and *Cooli Mootootoe Pannikerri*. They ascribe to these spirits the power of occupying the bodies of men whose souls have departed: they have no power over Christians, even those who are so merely in name not in heart. Every individual has his own special demon whom he serves, and who in return assists him in the execution of his projects. They suppose that if a man has no other way of venting his wrath on his adversary he can send his own demon to do it for him. To effect this purpose he must make an image of the demon, and perform certain ceremonies before it, upon which it sets forth, and assails the victim with all kinds of diseases, madness, convulsions, etc. In order to discover whether these disorders proceed from natural causes or from malign influence, the friends of the patient repair to a *Cannuane* or soothsayer, who determines the question by the result obtained from counting up some cowries, and can also indicate the person from whom the evil spirit was sent; the latter immediately confesses his guilt, or if he refuses, is brought before the rajah and compelled to do so, while the sufferer on his part must promise to make restitution of any thing to which the other party had a lawful claim. The exorcism proceeds as follows. A man of the washerman caste is introduced who has a drum shaped like an hour glass, he describes a magic circle on the ground within which he makes various characters, in red and white, and then flowers in pieces of betel leaves, rice, turmeric, Iscora flowers, arecanuts, tobacco, palm leaves, and date shells, etc.. A woman taken from the household of the party who has employed the aid of the demon, is made to sit down facing the circle, clothed in a white garment, her hair floating loose, her arms folded, and carrying on her bosom a cashewnut leaf. The washerman now beats his drum, singing at the same time a magic song: on which the unclean spirit quits the patient and enters the body of the woman, who immediately sets up a tremendous howling, and begins to jump about like a mad woman; then the demon speaking through her voice announces the rewards he expects and the rights to be performed in return for the alacrity with which he has executed the mission of his employer. These being promised, the spirit leaves the woman, who falls down as if dead and lies in this posture for an hour; at the expiration of which the washerman takes away all that he put in the circle and

eats it with his household: he receives four fanams in payment for his services; a like sum is also paid to the Canniane.

The official at Paponetti told me that he had witnessed very strange effects from those exorcisms at which he had himself sometimes been called in to keep order. On one occasion, a woman was brought in to him, very ill, to all appearance dead. Her friends complained, that an evil spirit had been sent to her by a Nair woman, whom they produced, and that the patient had lain seven days without food, like a corpse. The accused was asked whether the tale were true; she replied in the affirmative adducing as the motive, that a little piece of gold, worth about two risc dollars, which she had inherited and wore as an ornament on her neck, had been stolen from her. The officer commanded her to recall the spirit; this she performed with the usual rites, and the sufferer who lay inanimate, opened her eyes in his presence, asked for cheese and betel, and in short was restored to perfect health and walked home.

These people are also addicted to the observance of lucky and unlucky days. Monday and Thursday come under the latter category, and Sunday under the former. The last day of the month is unlucky. It is a bad omen to meet a cat or a snake, on first going out in the morning, and they will turn back to escape passing it: this they will do also if a crow flies past on the left hand; on the right hand it is considered lucky. It is a good sign to sneeze with the face turned towards the house from which they have come out, but with the face turned in the direction in which they are going it is unlucky. Leo is the most propitious sign of the zodiac, and it is a piece of good fortune to be born and business is best executed under its influence. Thus you see dear friend, how superstition rules this land¹.

LETTER XXV.

Discrepancy between the Chronologies of Holy Scripture, and those of the Gentile Nations. An account of the feast days of the Malabars.

The science of chronology has ever proved one of the most difficult subjects which have engaged the attention of the learned, who have not a little increased its perplexity by attempting to reconcile the system of Holy Scripture with those of the gentiles; this seems to me a hopeless endeavour, for all the traditions of eastern nations, are extravagantly fabulous and inconsistent with each other. This is very conspicuous among the nations of the East Indies, where the chronological systems of China, Pegu, and

1. Note II, pp. 247—257.

Malabar, are totally distinct. How therefore can we rely upon them? The system of Holy Scriptures on the other hand, is both genuine and simple, narrating a regular succession of events, and seasons. St. Augustine remarks with justice in his work *De Civitate Dei*: "We need not doubt that those things related by profane writers which are contrary to the statements of Holy Scripture are false, for reason teaches us that what God through his Holy Spirit speaking to us in the Holy Scriptures relates, is more worthy of credit than the words of men, because he can foretell on before the things which are to happen"¹

If we apply this passage to the chronological theory in vogue among the Malabars we shall see confirmation of its truth. They affirm that many thousand centuries have elapsed from the creation of the world to the present time, and they make use in their reckoning of time, of certain periods which they call *Diva Varussam* supposed to be divinely appointed; each of these periods or cycles consists of 365 years, 3 months, 2 days, and 30 hours, and several of these *Diva Varussam* make up a great cycle or age consisting of some thousands of years.

The first age from the creation of the world is called *Crida Ugam*, and this lasted for the space of 4,800: *Diva Varussam* amounting to a period of 1,753,210 years, 6 months, 24 days and 16 hours.

The second age *Treda Ugam*, contained 3,600 D. V., or 1,314,908 years, 10 months, 8 days, 14 hours.

The third age *Duavara Ugam*, contained 2,400 D. V., or 872,600 years, 4 months, 12 days, 9 hours.

The fourth age *Cuti Ugam* will consist of 12,200 D. V., or 438,032 years, 8 months, 6 days and 56 hours; of this age only 4,827 years have elapsed up to the present time².

While on this subject we must observe, that the year begins in October (which they call *Talla Massam*) and that each day is divided into 60 hours³.

The above-mentioned system of chronology is only preserved and adhered to in their temples; in their daily intercourse they make use of certain epochs and eras which are mentioned in their legal documents and letters.

In the low-lands of Malabar, especially in the kingdom of Cochin, there are two of these eras. The first is the year *Coulam* or *Coulam*, which takes its name from the northern Coilam, the

1. Note 1, pp. 258—260

2. Note 2, pp. 260—265

3. Note 3, p. 265.

place whence, after his partition of the kingdom, Cheramperumal started, either for the Ganges, or, according to the Moors, for Mecca. The current year, 1723, they date the year of Collam 899.¹

The second era the year *Pooda Varpum*; which they call the new style, was first established when the island of Vypeen was recovered from the sea and inhabited by men. This was 383 years ago.²

In the high lands of Malabar, and in other heathen nations, there is another system of cycles of 60 years. This was ordained by the prophet Paroese Raman. Each of the 60 years has a peculiar name, so that it may be always known how many years of the cycle have run. When the number is complete they begin again from the beginning.³

They divide the year into 12 months, the first day of each month corresponds with the thirteenth or fourteenth of ours.⁴

Magaram	or	January	has 30 days.
Cumbam		February	„ 30 „
Meenam		March	„ 30 „
Madum		April	„ 31 „
Eddavum		May	„ 31 „
Methunum		June	„ 32 „
Carccadagam		July	„ 31 „
Chingam		August	„ 31 „
Cunnee		September	„ 31 „
Toolam		October	„ 29 „
Vrechecum		November	„ 30 „
Dhanoo		December	„ 29 „

There are certain annual festivities universally observed.

1st. On the first day of the month Madum, they celebrate the feast Biloe or the New year,⁵ not that the year commences then, but at the season of the departure of the Emperor Cheramperumal in September, from which era they date. In the morning of this day, they put some gold into a copper basin, and scatter Ixora flowers about; besides distributing money or food and illuminating, after which they bathe. This feast is solemnised in honour of Vishnu.

1. Note 4, pp 265—275.

2. Note 5, p. 275.

3. Note 6, p. 275.

4. Note 7, pp. 276—281.

5. Note 8, pp. 281—286.

2nd. They hold another feast called *Pattamoedasjam*¹ on the 10th of the same month, when they say that the sun has attained its meridian, and the days and nights are of equal length, they are accustomed on this day to offer vows in the pagodas, to illuminate with lamps, they carry the idols about in procession, and fire cannons or guns, which latter is a religious ceremony used on high occasions. These solemnities, which last for forty days and terminate in the *Pattamoedasjam*, are dedicated to the sun.

3rd. On the new moon of the month of July, they keep the feast *Baauw*² with fasting and prayers on account of the arrival of the souls of their departed ancestors, who they believe visit their houses on that day. They prepare and set food outside for them, which food becomes the property of the crows: and the dwellers by the sea-shore bathe for the purification of the said souls.

4th. In August comes the feast *Onam*,³ or the birth-day of Sida, the wife of *Sri Rama* or Vishnu. This is observed by some people for four days, by others for seven. They raise a hillock in front of their dwellings, smeared with cow-dung and strewed with flowers, on which they set up the image of Vishnu, clothed in a new garment, and provided with an open cocoanut for food. Those castes who are allowed to partake of fish must abstain from it on this day, and the upper people distribute garments to their servants.

5th. Sixteen days after *Onam* comes the feast of *Magam* in honour of *Paramesiri*, or *Parwadi*, the wife of Parameswari or Vishnu in another form. For, as you must know they teach, that Vishnu underwent thirteen transmigrations.⁴ The ceremonies observed on this occasion resemble those of the preceding feast.

6th. This same feast of *Magam*,⁵ or *Onam* is held also in September or even in October, in memory of the goddess *Patrakalli* also called *Pagodi*. The ceremonies coincide with those of the feast of *Onam*, except that cakes are to be baked with sugar and laid before the Goddess.

7th. The feast *Tirawedira*,⁶ is celebrated in December. This is an occasion of mourning and lamentation among the women

1. Note 9, p. 286.

2. Note 10, p. 286.

3. Note 11, pp. 286—306.

4. Note 12, pp. 306—323.

5. Note 13, pp. 323—324.

6. Note 14, pp. 324—330.

who now complain to the gods that they have not been equally endowed intellectually with man. They must not sleep all the night, nor partake of cooked rice.

8th. In January they observe the feast *Purny*,¹ the birthday of Pagodī Sri Couroumba, when they kill several cocks and offer them before the Pagodas. The Brahmins are excluded the temples for three days on this occasion.

9th. This feast to Parny is also held in February, and at Paldurti² in Cochin in March, when a party of Nairs bound by an oath, cause themselves to be suspended by an iron passed through the skin of their backs to a swing (*wip*) and remain thus hanging for some time and fencing with sword and shield:³ a frightful spectacle! On this occasion they exhibit various images, marching them about in procession as the Papists do on Shrove Tuesday, and thus it is a great time for merry making. It is the only festival to which all castes, even the lowest, are admitted, and it lasts two days.

It is dedicated to the sister of Pagodī or the goddess Sri Couroumba, called Assagia.⁴

10th. In this month also is celebrated the feast of *Oel Pouram*⁵ or consecration, in memory of the visit of the sea god to the Pagoda *Arad polda*, a stone yet remains standing by a little stream at the corner of the Pagoda in memory of this event. Nearly 25,000 pilgrims repair here on this day.

11th. In March is held the feast *Oelsagam*, when the idols are carried about in a palanquin or on an elephant, accompanied by armed men who make all kinds of rejoicing with trumpets, games, and dances. The last day of *Oelsagam*⁶ is the feast *Proe Ona* on which occasion they bathe. This feast is celebrated in memory of Siva and Vishnu.

12th. Eight days after, the feast *Asfami* takes place, on this day (which is also an annual fair) the souls in torment have recourse to Seeva, and the festival is celebrated with great solemnity in the temple of Curour.

I hope I have not wearied you with this subject, for though not a pleasant one, it is needful in order to form an accurate idea of the part of the world in which I now reside.

1. Note 15, pp. 330—343.

2. Note 16, pp. 343—344.

3. Note 17, pp. 344—347.

4. Note 18, p. 347.

5. Note 19, pp. 347—350.

6. Note 20, pp. 350—304.

LETTER XXVI.

Account of the Pepper, Turmeric, Cardamom, and Areca of Malabar.

You who live amid the bustle of trade, and daily load your magazines with costly wares collected from all quarters of the world, will doubtless be interested in reading about the commerce of Malabar, and the commodities it affords, which it shall be the purpose of this letter to describe.

Pepper, the cheapest but by no means the least useful of spices, is the chief production of Malabar and is collected in such abundance and good quality that this country may justly be styled the Mother of Pepper¹. It grows well in the low lands, but with far more luxuriance in the elevated tracts and along the hills and mountains. It is not planted in open fields, but in the close neighbourhood of trees, around which the branches climb, as the plant requires support. The leaves are large, and the pepper-corns spring from them, clustering in rows close to the stems. Their colour is green. These plants, which climb to a great height, last generally for eighteen or twenty years, when other grafts or shoots are substituted for them. When the pepper is dried, it acquires a black colour, occasioned doubtless by its natural heat; as is the case with cloves, which when first plucked are white, but when they have been laid out to dry, black spots appear and spread by degrees, till the whole clove assumes a dark hue. The unripe pepper-corns which get sometimes mixed with the ripe ones, dry away into powder, or shrivel up, owing to the heat of the latter. For this reason the East India Company never takes new pepper by weight, but let it lie by for some months in warehouses till the unripe corns have had time to decay and the bad are then winnowed from the good in presence of the merchants.

Many persons erroneously suppose that the white and black pepper are different plants. This is not the case. I have been told here that there are two methods of manufacturing the former from the latter, either by corroding the upper coating of the corn with lime, or by laying it aside for ten or twelve years, when the outer coat will dry off, and the upper-corn appear white².

The pepper of Malabar is that most prized: yet it is not equally good in all parts of the country. The pepper produced in South Malabar and Quilon is smaller than that of the North. No difference however is discernible in the fruit when exported, as it

1. Note 1, pp. 395—403.

2. Note 2, pp. 403—407.

is all mixed together. It is the principal article of trade of the East India Company in Malabar; it is calculated that they purchase on the average 2,000,000 lbs. annually collecting it in the factories of Cochin, and Chetwa in the North and of Porcad, Kulli-Quilon, Quilon and Pesa in the South. The sovereigns of these places and those likewise of Tekkenkoor and Berkenkoor, who send their pepper to Porcad, have made an agreement with the East India Company not to supply this article to any other nation¹. We cannot help saying that such a stipulation is hard both upon the subjects and the settlers; for it gives the East India Company the monopoly of Malabar products and the settlers have no choice of a market, but must perforce sell to the Company when they might obtain a much higher price from other countries. It is true they often find means of exporting their pepper by stealth, but as there are officers posted all round the sea coast, these smuggled goods are often seized and confiscated to the Company. The native princes sometimes participate in these smuggling transactions, though they never dare to confess it, being bound by contract to assist the Company. And indeed in their contracts with that body, they have looked well after their own interests, for they have secured the privilege of exporting on their own account 100 or more candies, which they sell to the merchants at a good price. The contracts are renewed every year, when the East India Company send two members from the Council to make an agreement about the price with the merchants in the presence of the Rajahs of Porcad, Kulli-Quilon and Quilon. When the price is settled, presents are offered to those princes. In Cochin and Chetwa, however, this does not take place, the price in those countries being always fixed. The pepper costs generally 11½ or 12 ducats per kandy of 500 lbs. but this sum does not all to go to the merchants, and they are obliged to pay a duty of half a ducat in some places, and more in the South, to the Rajah of the country.

The East India Company have never succeeded in persuading the Rajahs of Travancore and Colastri, and still less the Zamorin, to enter into a similar compact, because they are aware that it must be prejudicial to their interests. For being free to sell their pepper to anyone, they have the advantage of being able to demand a much higher price for it; and they also prevent its being properly sifted and cleansed, so that it is very inferior in quality. This pepper is chiefly bought by the English, and sent not only to Europe, but through private traders to Persia, Surat, Mocha, Coromandel, and Bengal, thereby causing detriment to the Company's traffic in those parts.

1. Note 3, pp. 407—408.

The French are engaged in this trade at Calicut, and the Danes at Eddawa, a place near Quilon; but having little money and less credit, it is but little they can accomplish. The new merchants of Ostend also are beginning to take part in it; but as they pay too high a price for their pepper (as well as for their linen goods), it is probable they make but little profit by it. The Zamorin has granted to the four chief princes of Malabar the exclusive right of exporting this article ¹.

The second plant that flourishes here and is exported to Europe, is the turmeric, called by the natives Burri-Burri, or native saffron ². This root is found in South Malabar, but too poor for exportation by the Company: they purchase the better sort, which grows in the north, in the territories of the Zamorin and Colastri. The turmeric plant closely resembles ginger, both in its root and leaf, and is planted every year. When ripe, the root is cut up, steeped in water, and then spread on mats or cloths to dry in the sun. It is used in Europe, as a dye, and in India in the preparation of a dish they call curry, which has a yellow colour. Its price is 10 ducats per kandy, and the East India Company collect at Calicut and Cannanore generally 200 kandies in a season.

The third production of Malabar which is exported to Europe is the cardamom ³; I am not aware that the true cardamom grows in any other part of the world. Two different species of this plant are found here one in Cochin or South Malabar, and the other, generally known by the name of Cannanore cardamom, in the Kingdom of Colastri. The first is the poorest of the two, and is not exported by the East India Company, but by the inhabitants, the English and others, who send it to Surat, Persia, Mocha, Coromandel, and Bengal, where the *Mussalmans* use it in their food, and particularly in a dish of rice called brinsje. This cardamom fetches, on the average two or three shillings per lb. The Cannanore species is rounder in shape, and more pleasant to the taste. Its price rises annually, as it is much in request with the English, and at present amounts to 100 ducats per kandy. The Company's demand is fluctuating, but the average quantity sold amounts to 20,000 or 30,000 lbs.

The cardamom grows on long stalks which spring out of the earth, the pods hanging on them in long bunches, rather far apart. When the weather is dry, the cardamom is white, but if rain falls

1. Note 4, pp. 408—409.

2. Note 5, p. 409.

3. Note 6, pp. 410—412.

while it is ripening, the bark or rind becomes brown; it then easily bursts and the little kernels fall out and are picked up by the natives and sold, though at a much lower price, generally for a shilling and a half per lb. When the cardamom is gathered, the stalks are burnt in the field, the ashes being serviceable for manure. This cardamom is not sown, but the land produces it spontaneously, the roots spreading along and under the soil, like those of the reed. When the cultivators wish to make the roots sprout up, they take heavy rollers with which they press them into the soil. They generally suffer the ground to lie fallow for a year, and in the second year roll and manure it to make it produce fruit. I have enquired of the natives whether the seeds might not be sown, and new cardamom fields be made in this way; but they replied in the negative, saying that the seeds would indeed germinate, but the stem would not grow bigger and thicker than a needle, and would wither away of itself. From this it appears that this plant is indigenous to certain districts, and cannot be grown in any other. Supposing indeed the case were otherwise, it may be that the natives would not allow it; for it yields the much more profit than pepper does, especially at Cananore.

In conclusion, I will mention the areca ¹, the trade in which is carried on throughout nearly the whole of the East Indies. You know of course enough of the appearance of this tree from books of travels, to be aware that its fruit springs out of its side, after having been for some time enclosed within a sort of rind, when the tree appears to be distended; till the fruit, having become hardy enough to brave the open air, bursts from its covering. You are also aware that throughout the East Indies this fruit is chewed, together with a leaf called *Betel* ² (a plant which grows like the pepper tree, and has similar leaves), a little lime being also mixed with it. It cleanses the mouth by its acidity, and makes the saliva blood-red, but when it is much indulged in, it corrodes the enamel of the teeth, so that they become black, with those who chew it in great quantities. The Areca serves the hindoos for dyeing, for which purpose quantities of it are dried and exported to Coromandel and Surat. The East India Company have made great efforts to appropriate to themselves the areca trade on this coast, but have not succeeded. But they have monopolized the trade in Ceylon, in spite of the dissatisfaction of the king of Kandy, and I am told, again 100,000 rix dollars yearly by it. In this country the natives traffic with it, and its

1. Note 7, pp. 412—416.

2. Note 8, pp. 417—422.

price varies, the kandy being worth sometimes $3\frac{1}{4}$, sometimes 4 rix dollars. There are also different sorts of areca, the common sort, the scented sort, the white, and the red, among which consumers may purchase according to their taste.

May Heaven prosper commerce, the sinews of our State.

LETTER XXVII.

Description of the Cocoa Palm, the Malabar Cinnamon, and Coffee shrub—Sanctity of Cows and Snakes in the eyes of the Malabars—Great Snakes—Quantity of Crocodiles—Dangerous Kites—Fire Flies.

When I reflect on the happy country life you lead, far remote from the turmoil in which most mortals are involved, your senses daily regaled with the sight of flowers and the scent of blossoming forests, pleasant tracts of clover field lying before you with dew drops like diamonds hanging on every blade and leaf, my heart is filled with sadness at the contrast afforded by the dreary meadows inhabited by noxious monsters, that surround me. But as there are novelties to be met with among the animals and vegetables here, which are unknown in the Netherlands, I hope you will not find it irksome if I give you some account of the most remarkable that occur to me.

The cocoa palm¹, which is the most useful of all trees to man, adorns the shores of Malabar with its lofty crown. It would be tedious to repeat all that has been said of its excellencies, for there is no part of it which is not serviceable for some purpose or other. It appears to thrive best under the influence of the cool sea breeze and near the salt waters of the sea; for, in more inland situations it is found to languish. It seems also as though it delighted in human society, being much fresher and more fruitful in the neighbourhood of houses than in retired places.

The Creator, whose wisdom is apparent in all His works, would seem to have bestowed especial thought on this tree. The long slender trunk, laden at the top with fruit, he has provided with a multitude of fibres which take root on all sides in the soil, thereby enabling the tree to withstand the blasts of the wind. The bark is enveloped in a kind of tissue, which some of the natives make into cloaks. The fruit yields water for the thirsty, food for the hungry, oil for culinary purposes and fuel for the lamp. If you wish to extract wine from it, you must make an incision in the top of the tree, and hang vessels round it; and from

1. Note 1, pp. 423—437.

the would there gradually drops a liquid which would otherwise circulated into the fruit. But now mark the wonderful change which this liquid undergoes. At first, it is sweet and rather nasty and as mild as our whey; but it soon becomes strong enough to cause intoxication. Vinegar, and sugar of a brown and clayey sort, may also be made from it. This liquid is a profitable article of commerce to the Company. At Batavia they distil from it a beverage as strong as brandy, which is mixed with brown sugar and called arrack, this is sent to all parts of India, and brings in a good revenue. The upper end of the trunk of the cocoa palm is soft, and when the bark is opened a sort of pith of a white lue is found inside, called *Palmyl*, soft and delicious to the taste, and not unlike the cauliflower: but, what is chiefly remarkable to a naturalist, in this part is found the germ of the fruit and its shoots, neatly enclosed in a tube or sheath.

I shall give you no description of the pineapple¹, jack fruit², mango³, cashew nut⁴, and other Malabar fruits. All books of travels abound in plates and descriptions of them. But it is right to remark that the cinnamon⁵ is found here: not the fine, pleasant, species which grows in Ceylon, but a wild species, having a rough, thick bark, like that of the *China-China*, and a strong disagreeable flavour. The root of this tree is fit for yielding oil, and the oil which is procured from the rind is at first red, but gradually decomposes and settles down into a kind of camphor. The natives use this cinnamon in cookery, and as it is very cheap, costing less than a stiver per pound, there is no demand here for the better kind. The English contrive to sell this Malabar cinnamon in an underhand way in other places.

The coffee shrub is planted in gardens for pleasure, and yields plenty of fruit which attains a proper degree of ripeness⁶. But it has not the refined taste of the Mocha coffee. An entire new plantation of coffee shrubs has been laid out at Ceylon, with what success, time will shew. If it thrive, great advantage no doubt will accrue to the East India Company, who will not thus be compelled to purchase such quantities from Mocha, where the price is very high and continually rising on account of the concourse of European traders from all parts, while for the same reason the

1. Note 2, p. 437.
2. Note 3, pp. 437—444.
3. Note 4, pp. 444—445.
4. Note 5, pp. 445—447.
5. Note 6, pp. 447—449.
6. Note 8, pp. 450—451.

value of the European and Indian wares brought there, is greatly diminished.

This country of Malabar, though mountainous in the interior, contains but little mineral wealth, except iron, which is not expensive here, and is exported to Mocha after being beaten out in small bars. The natives make their firelocks of this metal, and their swords likewise, though they prefer cutlasses of European workmanship. The loadstone is very cheap here. You can get it for 1 shilling per lb. But whether it is found here, or, as some have told me, is brought from the Maldives, I cannot positively say.

And now to pass on to the subject of animal life. ¹ You have heard perhaps that animals are esteemed holy among the Malabars,² a coincidence with, or possibly an imitation of, the superstition of the ancient Egyptians, among whom the slaughter of a cow was reckoned a heinous crime. A rajah, when he mounts the throne, must take an oath to protect cows, brahmins and women. They cannot comprehend how we, Europeans, can be so cruel as to kill an animal which yields milk and butter for man's sustenance. Therefore the places where cows are slaughtered are looked upon as unholy, and whenever they can prevent the act they do so. Among themselves any one who kills a cow is held guilty of murder, and though the murder of a man may be expiated by the payment of a sum of money, mercy is not easily extended to the crime of cow-killing. It is true that cows are daily brought into the town of Cochin which have been stolen by Christians belonging to the Company's jurisdiction, and we are obliged to wink at this practice, or punish the robbery, if discovered, by only a slight fine, or otherwise we should have to go without meat altogether.

It is not a little remarkable and must be ascribed to the wise decrees of Providence that although beef is prohibited to all natives and to Christians living under native rule, yet the number of cows does not greatly increase.

When a native is dying he takes hold of the tail of a cow which is brought alive to his bed-side: and some image that by doing this they are conducted to heaven.³ Thus the cow's tail serves much the same purpose to them, as wax tapers to the members of the Romish church, and in place

1. Note 9, pp. 451—453.

2. Note 10, pp. 453—455.

3. Note 11, pp. 455—456.

of holy water, they take cow dung, and spread it on their benches, floors and stairs, believing that the evil spirit cannot make his way over it to do them harm. They use this substance also in their purifications.¹

If a cow happens to die, the hide is stripped off by a certain caste or race, who are held in much the same low estimation with them, as flayers are among us. As the natives do not wear shoes, these skins are sold to the Company, a bundle or 20 pieces for 16 stivers; and they are sent to Ceylon where they are used for packing cinnamon.

There are great quantities of snakes here² Not only do they infest woods and fields, but they get into towns and houses also. We lose our fear of them in a great measure, from habit, but there is no doubt that they are very poisonous, and will kill a person who accidentally treads upon them. Otherwise, they rather try to escape from us. The natives esteem them as almost divine and hold their lives sacred.³ The cobra capella is the most revered. Its head is flat, broad and arched, and on its back is a figure resembling a pair of spectacles. The natives perform their *Som-baien*, or obeisance, to these snakes, and keep a bit of their gardens partitioned off in honour of them, and for the chance of their arrival. They burn a lamp, and place a dish of rice in these enclosures once a year. To such an extent do they carry the superstition, that whenever they find a dead cobra capella, they consider themselves bound to burn its body with a small piece of sandalwood, a grain of gold, pearl dust, corals, etc., using the same ceremonies as at the burning of a person of one of the high castes. The European soldiers and sailors sometimes turn this custom to their own account: first they kill a snake and then sell it for a fanam or two to the superstitious Canarese, who buy it for the sake of giving it a good funeral. The cobra capellas are also used by the serpent charmers in their arts—they are taught to dance, being enclosed in separate baskets with which the charmers go about from house to house. In these dances they do not spring up on their tail, as travellers are wont to tell us, but merely twist themselves and raise the upper part of the body, which is no doubt their natural attitude when they sit upright, so that there is nothing marvellous in it. Moreover their poison has been carefully extracted, by making them bite some hard material, in consequence of which the vessels in the mouth containing the venom are broken. When a snake moves in this manner, one man blows

1. Note 12, pp. 456—457.

2. Note 13, pp. 457—474.

3. Note 14, pp. 474—498.

on an instrument whilst another holds the cover of the basket over the snake, which keeps striking at it with its mouth as though it would bite if it could. The charmers are sometimes cheated by these snakes, if they are incautious in their management, so that it has become a proverb among the Malabars, that "the Carnakken (men who ride on elephants) and snake-charmers seldom die their natural death". When the dance is over they close the cover of the flat basket over the snake's head, and it creeps in of its own accord. In the mountains and remote jungles of this country there is a species of snake of the shape and thickness of the stem of a tree, which can swallow men and beasts entire. I have been told an amusing story about one of these snakes. It is said that at Barcelore, a chego had climbed up a cocoanut tree to draw toddy or palm wine, and as he was coming down, both his legs were seized by a snake which had stretched itself up alongside the tree with its mouth wide open, and was sucking him in gradually as he descended. Now, the Indian, according to the custom of his country, had stuck his *Teifermes* (an instrument not unlike a pruning knife) into his girdle, with the curve turned outwards: and when he was more than half swallowed the knife began to rip up the body of the snake so as to make an opening, by which the lucky man most unexpectedly was able to escape.

Though the snakes in this country are so noxious to the natives, yet the natives' veneration for them is still maintained. No one dares to injure them or drive them away by violence, and so audacious do they become, that they will sometimes creep between people's legs when they are eating, and attack their bowls of rice, in which case retreat is necessary until the monsters have satiated themselves and taken their departure.

The crocodiles or caymans also abound here¹, and are venerated by the Malabars. They are not so large or dangerous as those of Java. Most of the tanks and ponds of Malabar contain these animals, and they are found likewise in marshy places. They abound in the rainy season, when the plains are filled with water. I have myself seen six or seven of them in the short space between the town and the Company's gardens, about half an hour's distance. They are not very mischievous on dry land, but in the water they are more dreaded, as they occasionally drag a person down.

The tiger and elephant are so well known that I need not describe them here. I should mention however that in the fine

1. Note 11, pp. 498—500.

season a certain species of kite¹ is found here which I have never met with elsewhere. It is of an ugly red colour, furnished with sharp claws with which it snatches pieces of meat from a window, or fish and other eatables from men's hands or basins as they go up the streets, and then flies away with its booty. Though so much given to thieving, kites do great good within the town, acting as scavengers for the natives, who are by no means so neat in their habits as the people of Holland and Friesland. During the war of 1716 and 1717, they followed the army, finding abundant food to satisfy their hunger.

A little insect called the fire-fly² is found in India; it is very small in size, and emits a bright sparkling light, which can be seen glittering at a distance in the evening. A species of bird resembling our sparrow, which builds very peculiar nests in the shape of a sheath, is endowed by nature with the power of attracting these insects, as if for the purpose of obtaining their light in its nest. The substance which emits the light is situated in the extremity of the insect's body which in day-light, or after death, is as white as wax, if the insect's mouth is pressed, so as to hinder its respiration, the light is dimmed, but it shines out again brighter than before as soon as the pressure is removed.

1. Note 16, p. 500.

2. Note 17, p. 500.